

## Unit: Civil War

### Lesson: Social Impacts of Reconstruction

Name \_\_\_\_\_

The end of the Civil War brought social changes to the South. Many Southerners lost everything in the war, and former slaves now had their freedom. Most white Southerners dealt with the defeat with grief and dismay. Loved ones were killed, and property was destroyed. Over one-fifth of the South's population that were of military age died during the war. No one had seen this loss of life before. Over 260,000 men had died



*Confederate graves in Centreville, Virginia (1862).*

fighting for the Confederacy. Many more were wounded, and several suffered injuries that would prevent them from returning to a normal life. Many women had performed new duties during the war, such as running the family farm or business, because their husbands had left to fight. Some entered a profession such as teaching or nursing. After the war, many women continued in these roles because either their husbands were killed, or they had to continue to help support the family. Women also had to help husbands and sons who survived adapt to the

reality of defeat. Some white Southerners looked to a future in a New South, but others held onto their view of the Confederacy and remembered a Lost Cause. Confederate cemeteries and memorial days were established to recognize the Confederate war effort. Confederate General Robert E. Lee became the most popular figure to memorialize the Lost Cause. Many Southerners viewed the defeat as a great tragedy. Some even decided to **emigrate** to other countries in Europe, Mexico, and Brazil after the war.



*Confederate cemetery, Magnolia Cemetery, in Charleston, SC.*

Tensions often arose between Southern whites and freedmen. Many Southern whites did not agree with freedmen having the same rights as them. They resisted equal rights and refused to accept African Americans in their society. Not only were many Southerners angry about how African Americans were given rights, they were also upset with the involvement of Northerners in their lives.

Now that African Americans were free, they looked forward to living their lives as they pleased. Many were very cautious once the war ended. "We was afraid to move. Just like...turtles after emancipation. Just stick our heads out to see how the land lay," is what one freedman said. During slavery, they were forbidden to travel without a pass, and the roads had been heavily patrolled. However, after the war, they were free to come and go as they wanted. Many freedmen moved because they wanted to leave the plantations they were forced to work, and they moved to cities where they could find other jobs. Many families had been torn apart during slavery, so many freedmen took advantage of being able to freely travel to find loved ones. The Freedman's Bureau helped families reunite, and African American newspapers would print notices about missing relatives. Often times, though, lost family members were never found. After the war, freedmen no longer had to worry about relatives being sold, and they could now legally marry who they wanted.



*A Happy Family (c.1866)*



*Teacher and students in a classroom at Whittier Primary School, in Hampton, Virginia.*

Because slaves were punished if they tried to learn how to read and write, almost 80% of freedmen over the ages of 20 were **illiterate** in 1870. During Reconstruction, African Americans of all ages wanted to become educated. They established educational institutions with the help of the Freedman's Bureau and African-American churches. At first most teachers in these schools were Northern white women, but by 1869 there were more African-American teachers than whites. Some Southern whites did not want African Americans to become educated, so they used violence and threats to try to keep them away from schools. Despite this, more than 600,000 African Americans were enrolled in elementary schools by 1877.

Not only were schools founded, churches and volunteer organizations were as well. During slavery, slaves attended church services with their white owners. However, often the **preachers** would tell them to obey their masters, so many slaves began to hold their own private "praise meetings." When the war ended, many freedmen established their own churches, often Baptist or Methodist, and held services very similar to the praise

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Interior of The First African Church in Richmond, Virginia.



African American family receiving a visit from a KKK member (c.1872).

meetings. African-American preachers became very influential community leaders because they were able to completely control the churches. They often played a larger political role in the country, too. African Americans organized their own fire companies, trade associations, political organizations, and drama groups to help foster independence and offer freedmen leadership roles that had been denied to them during slavery.

Even though African Americans were given many freedoms once slavery was outlawed, they still faced severe discrimination and increasing violence. Some white Southerners joined a social club for Confederate veterans called the **Ku Klux Klan (KKK)**. It began in Tennessee in 1866, and it quickly spread to have chapters in several Southern states. The KKK became a violent **terrorist** organization. In two years, every Southern state had KKK chapters. Their main goal was to restore **white supremacy**, and they also wanted to prevent African Americans from exercising their political rights. There were other violent groups, but the KKK committed some of the most brutal acts of violence in American history. It was not only ex-Confederate soldiers who joined these groups. Ministers, merchants, military officers, Democratic politicians, and other professionals took part in the violent activities. Klansmen often

wore robes that covered their full bodies, including their heads, so that no one would recognize them and to appear more menacing. Crosses were usually worn on their robes. Between 1868 and 1871, thousands of men, women, and children were killed. Lynchings were frequent, with many victims hanged. Schools, churches, and homes were burned. African Americans were the largest targeted group, but whites who helped African Americans were also at risk. If a white person educated African Americans, rented land to them, or bought their crops, they would become targets.

The KKK also wanted to remove the Republican Party from power. Klansmen were angry because the Republicans had implemented a Reconstruction plan they did not like. For example, Republican John Stephens, a white senator from North Carolina, made public that over 3,000 African Americans had supported and voted for him, and he began to receive death threats. Stephens was assassinated in 1870. The KKK used violence to intimidate Republicans and African Americans before elections. During the 1868 presidential election, Klansmen assassinated Arkansas congressman James M. Hinds, three South Carolina legislators, and other Republican leaders. African Americans were too frightened to go to the polls to vote in Georgia and Louisiana, and Democrats won both states. During the 1875 state elections, the KKK led riots in the cities and openly attacked Republican and African-American leaders. Many African Americans were terrified and did not vote, which resulted in white Democratic candidates sweeping the election. The KKK used similar tactics in Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana to win the 1876 elections. By 1877, Democrats had control of all Southern governments.

The federal government did try to stop the violence by passing a series of Enforcement Acts in 1870 and 1871. One act called for federal supervision of elections in Southern states, and another one gave President Ulysses S. Grant the power to use federal troops in areas where the KKK and other terrorist groups were active. President Grant did not enforce these acts frequently, though, and in 1876, the Supreme Court ruled in *U.S. v. Cruikshank* that only states, not the federal government, could prosecute individuals under the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871. As a result, many of these crimes went unpunished by the Southern state governments.

As the American economy went into a depression in 1873, many Northerners began to grow tired of Reconstruction efforts and equality for African Americans. **Racism** began to emerge in the North, and derogatory images of African Americans became more frequent and acceptable in the North. When anti-Reconstruction violence occurred again in 1874 and 1875, many Northerners did not want the federal government to become involved. Then in 1882, the Supreme Court ruled the Enforcements Acts unconstitutional. By the early 1880s, violence from the KKK and other groups had decreased, but it wasn't because of legislature. It was because they had managed to restore white supremacy throughout the South, and the violence was not needed now that white supremacists were in control.